



DANIEL BIBLE STUDY
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Sample Lesson



Week 1: But Daniel was Determined



Bible Verses: Daniel 1



Bottom Line: Daniel was determined to be faithful.



Bible Verses: Adversity, Determination, Risk, Faithfulness

SERIES PREP

The Bible Project does a great job of explaining the format of the Book of Daniel. It would be helpful for small group leaders to view this video on Daniel before each lesson (approximately 9 minutes long). The video is available on Youtube and at the link below.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/daniel/>

[At the time of publishing this series, this link works. If it no longer works when you try to use it, see if you can find some videos online to summarize the topic of the lesson. Be sure to screen these ahead of time to make sure they contain no errors!]

TEACH

INTRODUCTION

I'm really excited to start a new series this week on the Book of Daniel.

But before we jump in, I want to ask you guys a quick question:

What comes to your mind when you hear the word adversity?

[Allow 1-2 minutes for the students to answer.]

The word *adversity* can be used to describe any kind of challenge that we might face as we live our lives — any difficulty we have to walk through or challenge we have to overcome.

One thing that is always true about adversity though: sooner or later, we all have to face it.

It's a part of life.

Since we can't avoid them, we have to learn how to walk through hard times.

And one of the best ways we can prepare ourselves is by learning from others who have faced difficult times themselves.

We all love stories of people overcoming challenges and beating the odds.

Stories like Michael Jordan getting cut from the basketball team when he was in high school.

Or Thomas Edison failing over 1,000 times before inventing the lightbulb.

Or Mirabel being the only member of the Family Madrigal without magical powers and never getting to talk about Bruno... poor Bruno.

We love stories like this because they show us not only that it's possible to overcome adversity but also how to do it.

...which brings us to Daniel.

The Book of Daniel is filled with stories of overcoming difficulties because of the determination and faithfulness of Daniel and his friends.

There were challenges involving kidnapping, dreams, idols, furnaces, lions, and even vegetables, and Daniel and his friends overcame them all.

Here's some quick background that shows why Daniel and his friends faced so much

adversity.

Daniel and his friends were members of a family called the Israelites.

This family was so big that it made up an entire country.

Most of the Bible is the story of this family.

The Israelites' home was a country called... Does anyone want to guess?

Israel... crazy how that worked out.

This home was a big deal because God had promised to give them this country as their home a LONG time before Daniel was even born.

God's plan for the world was to redeem it, to bless it, to knit together all its broken pieces and make it whole, and he had invited this family, the Israelites, to be the main characters in that grand mission.

And their home, Israel, was to be ground zero, home base, for God's healing of the world.

But once they got to their home, they forgot God's calling on their lives.

The Israelites began contributing to the brokenness of the world instead of healing it.

Their kingdoms became violent — they oppressed and enslaved those who were less fortunate.

Israel became the opposite of what it was supposed to be.

Over and over again, God sent messengers who told the Israelites to remember God's calling to save them and warned them that if they continued down the path they were on, their home would be taken from them.

In other words, if they kept contributing to the brokenness of the world, then their world would, itself, be broken.

But most Israelites didn't listen.

So what God promised *would* happen *did* happen.

There was a powerful country called Babylon, and they conquered the Israelites' home.

It was a brutal defeat.

After Babylon conquered the Israelites, they kidnapped a bunch of them and brought them back to Babylon to serve their king, Nebuchadnezzar.

Phenomenal name.

Daniel and his friends were some of the people who were kidnapped and brought to Babylon, and they were only teenagers at that time!

This is when their adversity began.

But in the face of all that brutality and sadness, God promised that God would be with them in Babylon and that, one day, He would bring them back to their home.

LESSON

At the beginning of the story, Daniel and his friends had found themselves in a place that they didn't expect.

Their lives had changed drastically.

One day, they were living their lives, in their homes, doing their thing, and then the next day, they had been taken to a country that was completely foreign to them, surrounded by people who spoke a language they didn't understand.

Can you imagine what they must have been thinking?

Can you imagine all of the feelings they must have been feeling?

I wonder if they felt alone.

I mean, they were stranded in a place that wasn't their home — a place they didn't fit in.

If you've ever lived through adversity maybe you've felt this way, too.

When faced with challenges that we aren't expecting, it's normal to begin to wonder if God is really with us at all.

It would have been so easy for Daniel and his friends to believe that God had abandoned them, but instead, they did the opposite.

From the very beginning, Daniel and his friends trusted in God's promises, even when everything around them seemed to be going up in flames... literally.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever faced unexpected adversity? If so, what did it feel like?
2. Have ever felt as though you were alone or that you didn't belong? What was it like?
3. Why do you think adversity makes us feel alone?
4. Have you ever had to trust that God was with you even if it didn't feel like it? If so, what was that like?
5. What or who has been helpful to you when you have faced adversity?

Read **Daniel 1:1-7** (New Living Translation) - Daniel's Dilemma

1 During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

2 The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives.

4 "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon."

5 The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

6 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah.

7 The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

So, Daniel and his friends are taken to Babylon.

They are given Babylonian jobs.

They are given Babylonian food.

They are even renamed Babylonian names, and to make it even worse, their new names are just as hard to pronounce as their old ones!

Say Belteshazzar five times fast.

I dare you.

Everything that happens to Daniel and his friends is done with an agenda in mind: the Babylonians are trying to get these teenage Israelites to forget their old identities, to forget the family they were a part of, to forget the calling on their lives, and to embrace their new identities.

The Babylonians are trying to make Daniel and his friends reject their identity as Israelites, as members of God's family, and embrace the Babylonian identity.

Talk about peer pressure.

So, in the face of this adversity, Daniel and his friends have a choice: are they going to reject their true identities and drink the Babylonian Kool-Aid?

Except it wasn't Kool-aid — it was food.

You see, the Israelites had strict rules about what food they could and couldn't eat.

God had given them an entire meal plan.

A divine menu.

God gave them this menu so that even when they ate they would be reminded of God's promises and of their part in God's mission.

This menu can still be found in your Bible in the Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy.

The Israelites took this meal plan very seriously.

It was part of their identity.

So when they were offered Babylonian food, it wasn't simply about eating.

The food symbolized the new identity.

A new way of being in the world.

By eating that food, they would have been declaring to the world that they were no longer Israelites.

And it would have been easy to give in and eat it.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think Daniel and his friends felt when faced with this choice?
2. Can you think of a time when you felt pressure to be someone that you're not? How did that feel?
3. Have you ever had friends who encouraged you to live in a way that was damaging either to yourself or others?
4. What do we do when faced with a situation like Daniel's, when it is easier not to follow God?
5. What do you think you would have done if you were Daniel?

Read **Daniel 1:8-14** (New Living Translation) - The Test

8 But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.

9 Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel.

10 But he responded, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded."

11 Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

12 "Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said.

13 "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see."

14 The attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.

It would have been so easy to eat the food, to reject God, and to embrace their new identities as Babylonians, but that's not what they did.

Daniel and his friends refused to reject their identities as members of God's family.

"But Daniel was determined..."

In the face of incredibly hard times, Daniel was determined.

Daniel was determined to trust that even if all the evidence pointed in the opposite direction, God would fulfill His promises.

Daniel was determined to hold on to the hope that God would make it right.

Daniel was determined to trust that God was with them even in the hard times.

So Daniel came up with a plan.

Daniel knew that God's way was the best way, and he trusted that hope so deeply that he was willing to put it to the test.

Because it's one thing to believe something in your head, but it's another thing to let that belief change the way that you act.

And remember, Daniel was determined, so he proposed a test.

Daniel and his friends would eat different food than the Babylonian youths for ten days — food that was part of God's menu — and at the end of those ten days, they would see who was healthier.

Almost like a vegetarian body-building competition, but you know, for the Lord.

This was risky.

If it didn't work, they would be in danger of punishment.

But Daniel was determined to follow God, so he accepted the risk.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you think Daniel and his friends felt when faced with this choice?
2. Can you think of a time when you felt pressure to be someone that you're not? How did that feel?
3. Have you ever had friends who encouraged you to live in a way that was damaging either to yourself or others?
4. What do we do when faced with a situation like Daniel's, when it is easier not to follow God?
5. What do you think you would have done if you were Daniel?

Read **Daniel 1:15-16** (New Living Translation) - The Test Results

15 At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king.

16 So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

Daniel and his friends passed the test.

The risk paid off.

After ten days, Daniel and his friends were healthier than those who ate the king's food.

Can you imagine the relief they must have felt?

They had found a way to remember who they were and trust in God's promises in the face of a difficult challenge.

And they were healthier for it.

God had honored their faithfulness and had shown that God's way is the best way, even if it isn't always the easiest way.

And it wasn't just Daniel and his friends who benefited from Daniel's determination to follow God.

Now, everyone in King Nebuchadnezzar's court could see God's faithfulness, too.

I wonder what the other people in the king's court were thinking when they saw the benefits of Daniel's faithfulness to God.

I wonder if any of them wanted to change their diets as well.

Because that's the thing about when we live a life trusting in God... it begins to affect the people around us.

Daniel's attendant and his friends surely saw that because he switched their diet permanently.

Daniel's determination to follow God actually changed their environment for the better.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever seen God be faithful to fulfill a promise? If so, what was that like?
2. Can you think of an example of someone who was able to change his/her environment for the better because he/she was faithful to God?
3. Can your current environment — school, work, home — be changed for the better? What would that look like?
4. Do you ever doubt that we actually have the ability to make the world a better place?
5. What are three ways you can make your environment a better place by following God?

Read **Daniel 1:17-20** (New Living Translation) - What Came After

17 God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams.

18 When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.

19 The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service.

20 Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.

Daniel and his friends were determined to trust in God's promises, even when it was hard.

And they were determined to trust God deeply enough to let Him shape the way they lived their lives.

They took a risk because they were determined to follow God no matter what, and as a result, they changed their environment for the better.

Not only that, they were then promoted and given more responsibility, which meant that after this first trial, they were able to influence others for God on an even grander scale.

Over the next couple of weeks, we are going to see this pattern come up again and again.

Daniel and/or his friends are faced with adversity, but they are determined to follow God no matter what.

This determination puts them in dangerous situations, but God is faithful to fulfill His promises.

As a result, Daniel and his friends are able to influence others for God, even in one of the hardest places and most difficult times imaginable.

We can learn so much from Daniel and his friends.

When we face difficult times, we can remember Daniel's determination to trust God's promises no matter what.

When we face challenges, we can remember Daniel's determination to hold on to his identity as a member of God's family and let that shape his actions.

When we face unexpected adversity, we can remember Daniel's determination to make his world a better place.

And then, maybe, we can be determined like Daniel was.